OMRI DAILY DIGEST
No. 30, 10 February 1995

ESTONIA'S LAST PRIVATIZATION ROUND. The deadline for bids in Estonia's last round of privatization expired at noon on 9 February, BNS reports. Privatization Agency Director General Vaino Sarnet said preliminary interest in the 43 enterprises offered for sale was great--an average of about six bidders per enterprise. The firms include 21 construction and building materials companies, five transportation firms, and three food processing enterprises. The largest of those companies is the Marat knitwear factory, with a total of 1,579 employees. -- Saulius Girnius, OMRI, Inc.

EU FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMISSIONER IN LATVIA. Hans van den Broek met on 8-9 February in Riga with President Guntis Ulmanis, Foreign Minister Valdis Birkavs, Finance Minister Andris Piebalgs, and some EU ambassadors in Riga, BNS reports. He expressed optimism that the Baltic States would sign association agreements with the EU before the end of June. When asked for a time frame for the Baltic States' full EU membership, he responded that "We are now really talking about the process and we (should rather) talk about the conditions and what conditions have to be met than try to be speculative about the calendar," Reuters reports. Van den Broek left for Tallinn that evening. -- Saulius Girnius, OMRI, Inc.

MIXED SIGNALS OVER ELECTIONS IN CHECHNYA. Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Shakhrai said elections to a new Chechen parliament could take place in December 1995, at the same time as elsewhere in the Russian Federation, Interfax reported on 9 February. Shakhrai suggested that elections to local Chechen bodies of power could take place earlier. He also disclosed that a referendum in Chechnya was planned in which he hoped the population would vote in favor of abolishing the presidency. Also on 9 February, Central Electoral Commission Chairman Nikolai Ryabov told Interfax he has no plans to organize or hold elections in Chechnya despite President Boris Yeltsin's decree asking the commission to assist the Chechen Provisional Committee for National Accord to do so. Meanwhile, the head of the Russian Federation's Territorial Administration in Chechnya, Nikolai Semenov, held a conference on restoring the Chechen economy and local administration. One of the speakers was opposition Provisional Council's armed forces leader Beslan Gantemirov who has been restored to his former post as mayor of Grozny. -- Liz Fuller, OMRI, Inc.

MORE THAN 1,000 MILITARY DEAD IN CHECHNYA. Col.-Gen. Mikhail Kolesnikov, the Russian armed forces chief of staff, told a 9 February Moscow briefing that 1,020 federal troops had been killed in the Chechen war between 11 December and 8 February. Radio Mayak stressed these were only losses suffered by the armed forces and did not include Interior Ministry or Federal Counterintelligence Service troops. Kolesnikov reported that 6,690 Chechen fighters had been "eliminated" and another 671 taken prisoner. -- Doug Clarke, OMRI, Inc.

GRACHEV DENIES CORRUPTION . . . Defense Minister Grachev, who has come under attack for alleged corruption and his mishandling of the Russian operation in Chechnya, rejected press reports that he had a secret foreign bank account and said the real target of the attacks on him was President Yeltsin, agencies reported on 9 February. His critics "want to force President Yeltsin out of office in the nearest future, and I get in their way," he said. Grachev added that the botched Chechen campaign was not the fault of senior commanders but of lower-ranking officers in the field. The defense minister's remarks came on the same day as a report on German television claiming that Russian troops took home more than $4 billion in illegal earnings during their four-year withdrawal from eastern Germany. The program quoted German investigators as saying that the illegal deals, involving cars, electronic goods, fuel, cigarettes, and alcohol, "clearly show the participation or knowledge of generals," Reuters reported. -- Penny Morvant, OMRI, Inc.